

BREAKING GROUND



THE *BREAKING GROUND* EMPLOYMENT SERIES

PRESIDENT OBAMA ANNOUNCES NEW INITIATIVES DURING NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

"Across this country, millions of people with disabilities are working or want to work, and they should have access to the support and services they need to succeed. As the nation's largest employer, the Federal Government and its contractors can lead the way by implementing effective employment policies and practices that increase opportunities and help workers achieve their full potential. We must also rededicate ourselves to fostering an inclusive work culture that welcomes the skills and talents of all qualified employees. That's why I've asked the responsible agencies to develop new plans and policies to help increase employment across America for people with disabilities."



[10] L.E.A.R.N.ING TO SWIM



[12] NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS



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The Binns Family was incorrectly identified as the Binn Family in the photo on page 6 of our Annual Arts Issue. *Breaking Ground* regrets the error.

CONTACT INFORMATION



This free publication is produced six times a year by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development and Kent Communications Group. Subscription requests, change of address, and submissions for possible publication should be directed to: *Breaking Ground*, Council on Developmental Disabilities, 404 James Robertson Parkway, Suite 130, Nashville, TN 37243. phone: 615-532-6615.

E-MAIL: breakingground@vanderbilt.edu.

Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities Grant Number 1-03999-1-0. Authorization Number 339371, July 2001. 5,600 copies. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$.46 per copy.



THE *BREAKING GROUND* EMPLOYMENT SERIES



BY WANDA WILLIS The staff of the Council on Developmental Disabilities and *Breaking Ground* magazine are pleased to introduce a series of articles about employment. As we examine the employment services available to people in Tennessee, as well as new initiatives going on around the country,

we are grateful for the skill of Bob Nicholas, the author of several of these articles.

Since 1985, the Council has worked in partnership with many groups to help people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities get and keep jobs. Over the years, the Council sponsored innovative demonstrations such as supported employment and self-employment initiatives, sponsored development of business leadership networks and statewide coalitions, and sponsored training and technical assistance from experts – all to change the way we do business, to build our capacity to help people get and keep jobs.

In spite of our efforts, Tennessee's Department of Labor and Workforce Development reports that we still lag far behind in helping Tennesseans with disabilities find jobs and stay employed.

Beginning this year, the Council is joining with old and new partners to do as Marc Gold urged us in the early 70's – 'Try Another Way'. We agree with his fundamental belief that an individual's ability to learn and work is directly related to our ability to teach and support.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

The Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy describes customized employment as 'a new competitive edge'. Customized employment means individualizing the relationship between job seekers and employers in ways that meet the needs of both. It provides an avenue to employment for job seekers who feel that traditional job search methods do not meet their needs. The result of a 'customized' approach to employment services is that individuals with significant disabilities do get and keep jobs in the community. In the coming years, we expect to increase efforts to bring customized employment services to Tennesseans with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.

A NATIONAL INITIATIVE

In 2011, the Alliance for Full Participation (AFP) will reconvene in Washington, D.C., with a focus on employment. Many of you participated in the 2005 AFP Summit to discuss disability policy issues. The Council is the liaison in Tennessee to the 2011 AFP Summit. Planning meetings are underway and a series of Webinars will be offered throughout the year to help us explore ways to meet the challenge of the AFP 2011: to double the number of people employed, to decrease the use of sheltered workshops and day services, and to give students more postsecondary choices.

If you are interested in joining the discussion and in creating better learning and support opportunities that lead to jobs for individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities, e-mail the Council at tnddc@tn.gov and share your thoughts.

Wanda Willis is the executive director of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.



SERVICE SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES TO BE EMPLOYED

BY ROBERT B. NICHOLAS, PhD

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the *Breaking Ground* series on employment for people with developmental disabilities. After a 27-year career with the New Jersey Department of Human Services, I have worked almost exclusively on projects to expand opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to be employed. I chose this area to continue my work because I was continually inspired by the stories of people with developmental disabilities whose lives were enriched as the result of being employed. These employment successes have established new possibilities for the vision of life for people with developmental disabilities.

For the past seven years, a partnership in Tennessee, comprised of the Division of Mental Retardation Services [recently renamed the Division of Intellectual Disabilities Services (DIDS)], the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), the Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD) and other stakeholders, has implemented the Employment First! initiative. The Tennessee Employment Consortium (TEC) serves as the steering committee for this initiative. The goals of the initiative are to increase the number of people served by DIDS who are employed and to expand the capacity of community service providers to provide employment supports. The Employment First! initiative has made significant progress and the TEC partnership has received national acclaim as a promising practice. Despite this encouraging start, there is much progress to be made.

This *Breaking Ground* series on employment is intended to educate stakeholders on the status of employment for people with developmental disabilities in Tennessee and nationally. It will explore trends, highlight successful practices and identify barriers to people being employed. It will present the views of service providers, State officials, advocates and people with disabilities who are employed. We hope it will stimulate dialogue on new opportunities for progress.

BACKGROUND

Since the late 1980s, the preferred paradigm for developmental disability services is to provide individualized supports to people to enable them to be fully included in their communities. Supports for employment are a core component of this new paradigm. Employment provides a person the opportunity to be a valued and paid resource to a community business. This increases a person's sense of competence and self worth, which are key contributors to quality of life. Employment also provides rich opportunities for relationships with co-workers and income that enables people to be more self supporting and purchase things they want. For these reasons, an emerging measure of the quality of state developmental disability systems is the percentage of people they serve in the community who are employed.

The term "supported employment" is generally used to describe the various services to assist people with developmental disabilities to acquire and sustain a paid job in the community. Services include assessments, job development, job placement, worksite adaptations, on-site job coaching, development of natural supports, supports to employers and long-term oversight. For people served by DIDS, supported employment services are on-going and configured based on individual needs.

ELEMENTS OF THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICE SYSTEM

The following is an overview of the key systems components that will be discussed in the series.

DISCOVERY

Employment starts with an interest on the part of the individual to be employed. Many people served by DIDS do not have the experience to know what employment is about or the possibilities for a life in the community that could result from employment. As a result, employment is often dismissed as an option because people "do not want to work". In response to this issue, agencies that serve people with developmental disabilities are increasingly adding "discovery" as a component of their programs. There are various models of discovery but, at its core, discovery is a structured process to assist a person to identify interests and skills through community inclusive experiences. A core outcome of discovery is the person's ability to make informed decisions about community employment. Discovery should be a core element of school transition programs and community programs for people with developmental disabilities.

BENEFITS PLANNING

Most people served by DIDS receive benefits from either Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or as the dependent of a Social Security beneficiary. In addition to the cash benefit, these two programs also trigger health coverage under either Medicaid or Medicare. A common concern of families is how work will affect these benefits. To address these concerns, the Social Security Administration contracts with community organizations in each state to provide all disability beneficiaries with access to benefits planning and assistance. The program is called Workforce Investment Planning and Assistance (WIPA) and its goal is to better enable beneficiaries with disabilities to make informed choices about work. In Tennessee, WIPA services are provided by the Tennessee Disability Coalition and the Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee.

Specifically, WIPA staff can inform people about Social Security Work Incentives that protect a portion of the benefit when the person becomes employed. A person can continue to receive benefits and health care while working as long as they stay below resource and income limits. It is important to emphasize that, although the benefit

level is reduced when a person works, the reduction formula is such that the total of the person's income and benefit is always greater than the benefit itself.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The initial step in the employment process is referral for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. In Tennessee, these services are provided by the Division of Rehabilitation Services. DRS's services are provided with matching funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The goal of RSA services is "to help individuals with physical or mental disabilities obtain employment and live more independently through the provision of such supports as counseling, medical and psychological services, job training and other individualized services."

People with significant disabilities, including people served by DIDS, are a priority for DRS service funding. Core employment services provided to people with developmental disabilities by DRS are assessments, job finding, job placement, stabilization and initial reviews. Supports such as assistive technology can be provided if needed.

DRS services are provided by State staff and a network of community rehabilitation provider (CRP) agencies. Many DIDS provider agencies are also CRPs which means they are able to provide the services for the entire employment process. DIDS providers that are not CRPs need to partner with a CRP in the employment process.

DIDS SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Once a person completes the VR process and is stabilized in a job, DIDS assumes funding responsibility for on-going supports for job retention. Supported employment services are provided by community provider agencies under contract with DIDS. That supported employment includes group employment supports and individual employment with varying levels of on-site supports. Supported employment is a service covered by Tennessee's Home and Community Based (HCB) Waiver, making the cost of extended employment services eligible for federal reimbursement. It is important to note that HCB regulations prohibit the use of HCB Waiver funds to supplant RSA funding. This results in the need for collaboration between the VR and developmental disabilities systems.

LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCY TRANSITION SERVICES

The most effective route for people with developmental disabilities to employment is to transition directly from school to work. Local Education Agencies can prepare students with developmental disabilities for employment and provide employment experiences. Further, during the transition process, they can collaborate with DRS and DIDS on "seamless transition" plans leading to graduation and to a job. The Department of Education has been supportive on the development of models for school to work transition for students with developmental disabilities.

ONE STOP CENTERS

Established under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), One Stop Centers provide comprehensive services to jobseekers. They represent the hub of the generic workforce system. They typically have resource rooms, employment counseling and a bank of current job listings. All citizens have access to the resources of One Stop Centers.

One Stop Centers can be rich resources for people with developmental disabilities and the community agencies that serve them. They offer opportunities for learning about various occupations, developing résumés and pursuing job openings. Additionally, there are increasing examples of people with disabilities accessing WIA funding for Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) and On the Job Training (OJT).

It is also important to note that the One Stop Centers maintain relationships with the employer community. Accordingly, community provider agencies can benefit from collaboration with One Stop Centers on dialogue and relationship building with employers.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE CENTER ON DISABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

The University of Tennessee Center on Disability and Employment (CDE) is an important resource to Tennessee's supported employment system. Affiliated with the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities at the Boling Center, CDE assisted in the establishment of supported employment services in Tennessee dating back to the 1980s. CDE employs experts on supported employment who provide job coach training, technical assistance to community provider agencies, supports to school districts on transition and employer outreach.

ASSOCIATION FOR PERSONS IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

The Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) is a national organization dedicated to improving and expanding integrated employment for people with disabilities. The Tennessee Chapter of APSE includes professionals who provide supported employment services and, accordingly, the organization serves as the locus of information sharing and the development of practice standards for the field. The membership also includes people with disabilities, family members and government officials, so the organization plays an important role in advocacy for employment. APSE is a valuable resource in planning and supporting the expansion of supported employment in Tennessee.

CONCLUSION

These are key elements of the supported employment service delivery system. The coordinated mobilization of these resources is essential to expanding employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities in Tennessee. Accordingly, efforts are needed to maintain effective working partnerships between stakeholders to drive progress. The *Breaking Ground* series will provide further information on each of these elements and their respective roles in fostering employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities in Tennessee.

Robert B. Nicholas, PhD, is a Senior Visiting Fellow for Disability Research at the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. He coordinates the research agenda for the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy funded National Technical Assistance and Research Leadership Center. He also provides technical assistance to the Tennessee Employment Consortium under a grant contract with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. He resides in Corryton, Tennessee.

NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

COMPILED BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

The following national resources are intended

to assist individuals with disabilities, families and disability service providers as they seek information on issues related to employment. The list is selective.

Disability Employment 101 is a guide that includes information about how to find qualified workers with disabilities, how to put disability and employment research into practice, and how to model what other businesses have done to successfully integrate individuals with disabilities into the workforce. Among other topics, the guide provides information regarding vocational rehabilitation agencies, Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers and Centers for Independent Living. It also includes checklists and other resources to aid employers as they prepare to employ people with disabilities.

www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ose/products/employmentguide/index.html

The **Employer Assistance & Resource Network (EARN)** provides employers with free consulting services and resources to support the recruitment and hiring of people with disabilities. EARN assists employers in understanding the practical business reasons and the practices that facilitate the recruitment and hiring of people with disabilities. EARN also offers assistance to employment service providers and jobseekers with disabilities. EARN is an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).

www.earnworks.com/

The **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)** is a service provided by the ODEP. JAN is one of several ODEP programs. JAN represents the most comprehensive resource for job accommodations available. JAN's mission is to facilitate the employment and retention of workers with disabilities by providing employers, employment providers, people with disabilities, their family members, and other interested parties with information on job accommodations, self-employment and small business opportunities.

www.jan.wvu.edu/

Survey of Employer Perspectives on the Employment of People with Disabilities

ODEP released findings of the most extensive survey in the history of employers' actions and attitudes toward employing people with disabilities. The objective of this nationally representative survey was to inform the development and promotion of policy and practice by comparing employer perspectives across various industries and within companies of varying sizes.

www.dol.gov/odep/documents/survey_report_jan_09.doc

The report **Empowerment for Americans with Disabilities: Breaking Barriers to Careers and Full Employment from the National Council on Disabilities** has two broad aims: (1) to summarize the existing knowledge regarding the employment of people

with disabilities in a series of short issue briefs, and (2) to present new information on the perspectives of employers, people with disabilities and disability specialists on the key barriers to and facilitators of employment. www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2007/NCDEmployment_20071001.htm

The **Family Village** is a Web site for children and adults with disabilities, their families, and their friends and allies. Family Village brings together thousands of on-line resources in an organized, easy-to-use directory. Visit the section: Family Village Employment Resources for People with Disabilities.

www.familyvillage.wisc.edu/general/Employmt.htm

Hire Disability Solutions has established itself as a national leader in protecting and enhancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Through its educational campaigns surrounding employment law, education opportunities and assistive technology, the company facilitates the success of individuals with disabilities and employers alike.

www.hireds.com/

Issue Lab is an on-line publishing forum for nonprofit research. Its mission is to more effectively archive, distribute and promote the extensive and diverse body of work being produced by nonprofits. A section on disability and employment includes a collection of research resources, as well as a podcast.

www.issuelab.org/closeup/Feb_2009

Real People, Real Jobs is a Web site developed by the Institute for Community Inclusion. It highlights the employment successes of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are working in paid jobs in their communities. Stories and videos represent a variety of categories, such as interagency collaboration, self-employment and job creation/negotiation.

www.realworkstories.org/

An article by Katherine J. Inge entitled **Choice and Customized Employment: A Critical Component** notes that up to 70% of community rehabilitation providers report that individuals with disabilities prefer to stay in facility-based, rather than community-based, employment programs. This edition of the "Customized Employment Corner" series (*Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 2008, 28, pages 67–70) confronts some challenges of helping individuals make informed choices about employment options. The questions and answers address issues of finding jobs that fit individuals' qualifications and choices, communication and funding.

www.worksupport.com/documents/katty2008.pdf

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.



BE IT RESOLVED: WHAT HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 139 COULD MEAN FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

BY BETH HOPKINS

Today's graduates must juggle personal, professional and family obligations amidst precarious economic conditions. As a recent graduate who happens to have a disability, I also must consider personal care, transportation and otherwise living on a limited monthly income. Without financial assistance and other support, I would be unable to enjoy as much independence as I do, and would face many more obstacles to full participation in community life.

And I am not alone.

With no access to home and community-based services, thousands of people across the State of Tennessee with developmental disabilities other than intellectual disabilities face the possibility of being removed from their homes and communities and placed in nursing homes or other long-term care facilities. For individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, passage of House Joint Resolution 139 (HJR 139) could be a turning point. It is the first step taken by State legislators toward fulfilling their promise to fund home and community-based services for Tennesseans with disabilities.

Specifically, HJR139 is "a resolution to support the development of cost-effective home and community-based services to Tennessee children and adults with a developmental disability". The resolution includes four supplementary components.

- A statement of recognition of the need of many individuals with developmental disabilities to have assistance and support services to live in their communities.
- An acknowledgement that there is a lack of adequate programs in place to provide such services.
- A statement in support of the development of cost-effective home and community-based services.

- A statement in support of the formation of a single, distinct entity within State government to plan, develop and administer services.

The benefit of home and community-based services in the life of a person with a disability extends beyond the individual to his or her family and beyond the family to the community.

Dylan Brown works for the Center for Independent Living of Middle Tennessee and has served as a member of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. According to Mr. Brown, who has a spinal cord injury, his ability to live and work independently would decrease significantly if he received no support services.

"Without [support from] two funding sources, I wouldn't have the ability to work full-time like I do, because I wouldn't be able to afford the cost of paying my personal attendants. I wouldn't be working, paying as many taxes, and I might be forced to live in a nursing home."

Had services not been available to Mr. Brown, he may not have been able to provide the leadership to his community that he has. His story offers just one example of the difference a small amount of support can make in the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

Tom Jerdon, a 2009 graduate of Partners in Policymaking, is the father of six children, including a 10-year-old daughter with Polymicrogyria, a developmental disability that can lead to autism, intellectual disability, seizures and other issues. Mr. Jerdon appreciates the importance of HJR 139.

"I think the resolution is a good way to keep the issues surrounding people with developmental disabilities in the forefront [for] our elected

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EMERGING TRENDS IN EMPLOYMENT FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

BY ROBERT B. NICHOLAS, PhD

INTRODUCTION

As the *Breaking Ground* employment series explores the possibilities for the future of employment for people with disabilities, it is important to note trends in the field. This article will discuss current trends in employment service practices and the implications of these practices for the future. The following are descriptions of three such trends.

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

In the 1980s and 1990s, when initial supported employment services were being developed, employers were largely unaware of the value of people with developmental disabilities in meeting their workforce needs. Employment specialists had difficulty getting employers to hire people with developmental disabilities and employment opportunities were limited to stereotypical jobs in the three Fs (food, flowers and filth). People with developmental disabilities largely were placed in any job that was available regardless of their interests or capabilities. This limited the opportunities for people with disabilities to succeed on the job.

In response to these limitations, the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) in recent years has supported the development of the "customized employment" model as the next generation of supported employment services. ODEP defines customized employment as "a flexible blend of strategies, services and supports designed to increase employment options for job seekers with complex needs through voluntary negotiation of the employment relationship with the employer."¹

Customized employment is inherently a person centered employment planning approach that results in a win for both the person and the employer. Essential elements of customized employment practice are: (1) a discovery process that determines interests and skills that the person has to offer an employer; (2) identifying an employer who has needs that are consistent with the person's skills and interests; (3) negotiating the conditions of employment with the employer to maximize the benefit of the person to the company's bottom line; and (4) the development of an individualized plan for supporting both the

individual and the employer.² Fundamentally, customized employment views both the person and the employer as the "customers" for employment staff.

The expanding use of customized employment has opened doors for people with developmental disabilities to work in a broad and diverse array of jobs. It has also established employer relations and supports as critical responsibilities of employment service agencies.

INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

Supported employment practice in the 1980s and 1990s involved utilizing strategies that assumed constant supervision in the workplace. This included extensive use of group (for example, enclave) and one-to-one job coach supervision models. In 2001, the Indiana University Institute on Disability and Community released a report highlighting the effectiveness of using natural supports in the workplace. The report presented the outcome of a six-year study of people with developmental disabilities in supported employment in the United States and Europe. The study found that employees who are better integrated into the workplace have better employment outcomes. This was true regardless of the level of disability.

The study further found that training and supports to co-workers are likewise correlated with more positive outcomes for supported employees. Finally, the report indicated that people who receive four or more hours of paid, on-site support weekly have poorer employment outcomes, again regardless of level of disability. This indicates that job coaches may act as a barrier to the very element that leads to success. In short, the study validates the need to focus employment supports on inclusion in the workplace and not direct supervision in order to achieve optimal employment outcomes.³

The recognition of the value of inclusion in the workplace has resulted in three new practice expectations for employment staff.

Development of Natural Supports. Employment staff are responsible to cultivate and support supervisors and co-workers

1 National Center on Workforce and Disability, *Customized Employment: Practical Solutions for Employment Success*, U.S. Department of Labor: Office of Disability Employment Policy, June 2005.

2 Martin Luecking, D. and Luecking, R., *A Descriptive Study of Customizing the Employment Process for Job Seekers with Significant Disabilities*, Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling, Vol 37, Number 4, Winter 2006.

3 Mank, D., et al, "Natural Supports and Coworker Roles: Research Findings," Indiana University, Institute for Disability and Community, 2001.

in the workplace to meet the person's support needs. The increased interaction with employer staff and the experience of being a contributing and valued member of the company's team will result in the person having more successful employment outcomes.

Job Coach Fading. As a person adapts to the job and receives increasing supports from supervisors and co-workers, employment staff should "fade" direct supports. Continued direct supports at the workplace can be a barrier to inclusion. Less direct support indicates success.

Indirect Supports. Even though direct supports are faded and the person works largely with natural supports, employment service agencies remain responsible for the person's safety and well-being. This requires employment staff to maintain contact with the workplace to avoid problems developing and to respond quickly to those that may emerge. Accordingly, employment staff utilize "indirect supports", which include periodic visits to the workplace, phone contacts with supervisors and co-workers, or being available for calls from the workplace to provide information or assistance.

DEMAND-SIDE STRATEGIES

Strategies for supporting people with developmental disabilities to be employed have involved employment staff outreach to employers to "sell" a person for a job. Even new customized employment strategies involve outreach to employers and negotiating the conditions of employment based on the person's interest and skills. In recent years, however, due to projected labor shortages from the exit of baby boomers from the workforce and an increasing appreciation of the value of employees with disabilities, large national corporations such as Walgreens, Best Buy and Lockheed Martin have established disability employment initiatives as components of their workforce recruitment strategies.

These "demand-side" or "market driven" initiatives are premised on each company's need for quality employees. The respective companies seek community partners (vocational rehabilitation agencies, disability services agencies, etc.) to identify appropriate candidates and provide skills training and on-going supports. These demand-side initiatives change the dynamic for the employment of people with disabilities.

Companies in the recent past have recruited people with disabilities. Although the current economic downturn has affected continued hiring of all people and growth of most companies, as the economy recovers we expect these demand-side strategies to drive additional progress in this area. Increasingly, employment service providers will be receiving calls from companies with workforce needs that may amount to hundreds of jobs in a given location. Employment service providers need to develop the capacity to effectively respond to these needs.

CONCLUSION

These trends portend rich opportunities for the employment of people with developmental disabilities in the future. However, employment service agencies need to adopt new strategies to support people in order to capitalize on these opportunities.

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 139 CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7 →

state officials. A way to, hopefully, help them consider the impacts that cuts of these existing programs will have. I think the resolution also sets a tone and direction for the disability community. We need Home and Community-Based Services, not institutions and large state programs. We need oversight of these services by one entity, instead of several, so that we have one system to navigate."

Though it certainly is a step in the right direction, the passage of HJR 139 is just that: a single step. Mr. Brown notes that much more must be done in order for home and community-based services to be realized in the lives of all Tennesseans that need them.

"I long for the day in which I don't have to preface that I am 'one of the lucky few' who get services and therefore can lead a more full life. This should be a right to all people with disabilities."

Advocates and self-advocates must continue their tireless work to see the promise for home and community-based services fulfilled for all the individuals with disabilities who are still living without them. Action must be taken in order for the resolution to effect change in the lives of individuals with disabilities and their families.

"The test of this resolution will be when the state government is able to actually put up dollars, to show action in accordance with the resolution," said Mr. Jerdon. "Anyone can sign a resolution, but to implement needed change—as implied in the resolution—that will be the true test to see if they truly believe in HJR 139. Deciding what programs to implement, who to give dollars to, to reorganize the current oversight entities, to give control to the people to make their own decisions, to treat the disability community with respect—are the issues that need to be addressed."

"If these changes are achieved, then HJR 139 was a great success," continued Mr. Jerdon. "Otherwise it is just words on a piece of paper."

The passage of HJR 139 must become more than an acknowledgement that people with disabilities have needs that should be met. Our legislators must recognize that individuals with disabilities play a part in their communities that is indispensable. Supporting one Tennessean with a disability means supporting the entire community by helping the community maintain its identity, autonomy and economic strength. The investment required to develop home and community-based services for persons with disabilities is an investment in the future of those individuals, their families, and the character and fortitude of their communities.

Beth Hopkins has her Master's in Nonprofit Organizations from the University of Georgia and her Bachelor's in Sociology from Middle Tennessee State University. She is an intern with the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and a 2002 Youth Leadership Forum Graduate.

L.E.A.R.N.ing to Swim

BY JO VER MULM

Coach Brandon Buschling didn't know the first thing about autism when Ryan Marshall started swimming on his team at Siegel High School in Rutherford County, but he immediately noticed that Ryan's intense focus—a classic characteristic of autism—was a huge asset in the water.

Ryan's parents, Steve and Teresa Marshall, noticed something else: how Ryan's typically developing teammates rallied around him, reveled in his achievements and enveloped him in their protective social cocoon. They observed that with the increased physical activity of swimming, Ryan seemed more alert and interactive at school and at home. "When Ryan is at a meet, he's completely independent of us," said Steve Marshall. "He goes with the team. He does everything any team member would do, and he does it very well."

It was then that Steve Marshall approached Coach Brandon with an idea: pair swimmers from the Siegel High School team with teens and young adults with developmental disabilities for individualized swimming instruction through the Life Enrichment and Recreation Network (L.E.A.R.N. of TN). Coach consulted with his swimmers, they readily agreed, and L.E.A.R.N. launched the first season of their swim program in April of 2009.

"That's the way L.E.A.R.N. is intended to work," said the organization's co-founder, Dave Davis. "If one person or family has access, influence or ability in a particular area, they share it with the rest of us. We're a network. We all work together for the good of all of our kids."

Each participant had a different reason for taking the lessons. Some were seeking exercise. For others, it was pure recreation. But 17-year-old Christopher Lacy had his eye on one prize—he wanted to learn how to swim. A frightening experience at a swim party had left him wary of the water. Still his mother, L.E.A.R.N. co-founder Tricia Lacy, urged him to try. "My mom wanted me to learn how to swim," said Christopher. "I didn't want to be afraid of the water anymore. I wanted to learn how to swim and stay afloat."

Christopher was matched with Lauren Goss, a 2009 Siegel graduate. Lauren and Christopher bonded quickly. "My instructor made me feel comfortable," recalled Christopher. "At first I was only able to swim a few strokes and then I had to stop. But each lesson my instructor encouraged me, and I got a little bit better."

"A little bit better" might possibly qualify for the understatement of the year. After just three weeks of lessons, Lauren, Coach Brandon, Christopher's mother and a handful of other pool observers were overjoyed, speechless and teary-eyed as they watched Christopher backstroke a 25-meter lap. "I was still afraid," said Christopher, "but my instructor told me I could do it and she was right. Now I can. If someone asks me to come to a swim party now, I know I can go because I can swim. I wasn't able to go to those types of parties before."

In all, 17 teens and young adults with developmental disabilities were afforded swim lessons through the program, but their six instructors learned a lesson too. Sarah Nassab, a sophomore at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville and a former Siegel swimmer, was recruited to give lessons. She said, "at school you see people with developmental



Photo by Tabitha Burns

Coach Brandon Buschling encourages his free-style relay team during warm ups at the Tennessee Special Olympics in May. Left to right; Jack Ver Mulm, Ryan Marshall, Ethan Wilson and Tanner King

disabilities and you don't know what to say to them, how to interact. Now I know they're just like regular kids. They do so much more than you think."

It was Ivar Lovas who originally said, "If a child cannot learn the way we teach, then we must teach in a way he can learn." Coach Brandon, an engineer by trade, didn't realize he was channeling the renowned autism researcher when he revealed his teaching strategy by saying, "We're not giving Red Cross lessons. Forget the checklists and levels. We're going to focus on what these kids can do and we're going to help them do it better. We're going to make these kids safe in the water and I might even make competition swimmers out of some of them."

It worked. Four of Coach Brandon's swimmers have become competitors. Ryan Marshall, Ethan Wilson, Jack Ver Mulm and Tanner King comprised Rutherford County's first ever free-style relay team at the Tennessee State Special Olympics in May. Ryan will return to the Siegel High School swim team as a junior in the Fall and his L.E.A.R.N. teammate, Ethan, a freshman, will join him. Coach Brandon supervised Ryan and Tanner on the Murfreesboro Parks and Recreation swim team over the Summer, and he's chomping at the bit to see more of his L.E.A.R.N. swimmers alongside their typically developing peers. Coach Brandon, Steve Marshall and Dave Davis already have plans to expand the program.

"I've been doing this a long time," said Coach Brandon. "I've coached some outstanding swimmers, but this is the most fun I've had."

L.E.A.R.N. is a non-political, non-ethnic and non-denominational organization of volunteers joining together to create possibilities for children and adults with disabilities. Learn more at www.learnn.org.

Jo Ver Mulm is the mother of swimmer Jack Ver Mulm and a graduate of the 2008-09 Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute.

17th TENNESSEE PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE BEGINS

During the September 11th and 12th weekend, 25 individuals with disabilities and family members met in Nashville at the Sheraton Music City Hotel, to begin their Partners in Policymaking™ advocacy and leadership training. This is the 17th class to gather since the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities began the Leadership Institute in 1993.

Over the course of seven intensive sessions, these Partners participants—representing different disabilities and diverse areas of the State—will learn about

- The history of the disability experience
- People First language
- Building inclusive communities
- Best practices in inclusive education
- Self-determination and person-centered practices
- Supported and independent living issues
- Customized employment
- Assistive technology
- Tennessee's disability services and resources
- State and federal legislative processes
- Working with the media
- Strategies for improving services and systems for persons with disabilities

They will also complete homework assignments, tour the Capitol, meet with a legislator, participate in a Mock Testimony, attend the Partners Annual Reunion Conference, network with their Partners peers and discover each other's unique challenges and successes.

The Council is pleased to welcome the 2009-10 Partners class.

Sam Allen, *Memphis*
Connie Bowlan, *Arlington*
Beth Brady, *Dandridge*
James Brown, *Antioch*
Savannah Davis, *Elizabethton*
Alyson Edwards, *Germantown*
Sharon Edwards, *Murfreesboro*
Alicia Fitts, *Brentwood*
Winnie Forrester, *Nashville*

Steven Johnson, *Clinton*
Richard Likens, *Smyrna*
Donald Martin, *Tullahoma*
Janice Martin, *Lascassas*
Cecilia Melo-Romie, *Franklin*
Jennifer Nichols, *Chattanooga*
Deborah Pearson, *Memphis*
Kimberly Raines, *Alamo*
Christi Rice, *Knoxville*

Maraina Roberson, *Memphis*
Lee Shelby, *Jackson*
Rick Skillington, *Lewisburg*
Jennifer Thorpe, *Shelbyville*
Sheryl Varnedoe, *Oakland*
Pamela Weston, *Sweetwater*
Stephanie Young, *Gallatin*



Photos by Ned Andrew Solomon

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE, INCLUDING AN APPLICATION FOR THE 2010-11 CLASS, PLEASE CONTACT:

Ned Andrew Solomon | Director, Partners in Policymaking
 Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

404 James Robertson Parkway, Suite 130 | Nashville, TN 37243-0228 | 615.532.6556 | ned.solomon@tn.gov

NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS APPOINTED BY GOVERNOR

Four new appointments and three reappointments were made to the Council on Developmental Disabilities in July and August. In his announcement, Governor Bredesen said, "We depend on the commitment of citizens like these Tennesseans...I appreciate their readiness to serve, and I am confident they bring the experience and knowledge necessary to become valuable members..."

Breaking Ground is pleased to introduce them to you.



ELIZABETH ANN RITCHIE, from Knoxville, is the mother of identical twin 23-year-old boys, who have an autism spectrum disorder, and a 25-year-old daughter. Ms. Ritchie will be representing the East Tennessee Development District on the Council.

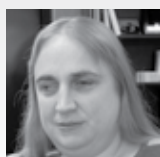
Ms. Ritchie says, "I joined the local chapter of the Autism Society of America when my children were first diagnosed at the age of three and began my second 'career' as an advocate for individuals with disabilities." She is past president of the Autism Society and has been a board member of the organization for 20 years. In addition, Ms. Ritchie has served, and continues to serve, on numerous other disability councils and boards.

Ms. Ritchie played a key role in establishing a non-profit agency, Breakthrough, which provides services for adults with autism. "I, along with others, was worried that after working so hard with the school system to develop a strong education program for students with autism, these students, my sons included, would go out of the schools into a world that did not have anything to offer." In 2007, Ms. Ritchie received the YWCA Outstanding Woman of the Year award for her volunteer efforts.

"I am pleased to be appointed to this Council to be able to continue my effort in this area. Not only do I hope to gain an even broader understanding of the issues facing individuals with developmental disabilities in our State, but I hope to be able to learn much more about the agencies and councils that support them. In addition, I hope to improve my knowledge base of the 'workings' of the State departments and the federal and state programs that are or should be available to provide assistance."



TONYA COPELAND of Nashville, is vice president of operations for the Eastern Region of Evergreen Presbyterian Ministries, Inc. and will represent the Mid-Cumberland Development District. Ms. Copeland describes herself as a "skilled facilitator with years of experience working with individuals with developmental disabilities. I also have a lifetime of experience, as I have several family members affected by not only developmental disabilities, but [other] physical and mental disabilities as well. This experience has undoubtedly influenced my professional path and passion to work in this field." She plans to bring her "can do" attitude, business savvy and commitment to excellence to the Council.



Sheri Grigsby



Pamela Huber



Nancy Hardin

Reappointed to the Council were **SHERI GRIGSBY** of La Vergne, an at-large representative; **PAMELA HUBER** of Kingsport, representing the East Tennessee Development District; and **NANCY HARDIN** of Dyersburg, representing the Northwest Development District.



ROGER D. GIBBENS, who lives in Chattanooga, will represent the Southeast Tennessee Development District on the Council. Mr. Gibbens, who is a patrol supervisor with the Chattanooga Police Department, is a Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute graduate (1995-96) and has two children, a 21-year-old daughter, Aimee, who has an autism spectrum disorder and a 19-year-old son, David. He has been married to his lovely wife, Monique, for 23 years.

Mr. Gibbens reports, "I have been an advocate for the disabled community for around 18 years. My advocacy began upon learning that my daughter has autism." He is past president of the local Autism Society and was involved in organizing the Superintendent's Advisory Council on Disabilities in the Hamilton County School System. Currently, Mr. Gibbens is a board member for The Arc of Hamilton County.

"As a Council member, I am very interested in finding ways to provide more services for people to transition from high school into the adult world. This is particularly of interest due to my daughter's impending graduation from high school. I would like to...see...a greater range of career opportunities than what are currently offered...My greatest wish is to help the Council make a positive impact on the lives of those who are in the disabled community."



DIANE T. (SANDI) KLINK lives in Memphis and will be an at-large representative on the Council. Ms. Klink, who is a long-time advocate for herself and other people with disabilities, is assistant director of the Memphis Center for Independent Living, and a graduate of the 2002-03 Partners in Policymaking class. She notes that, "I am a proven speaker, peer counselor and manager....Partners in Policymaking enriched and expanded these skills and formed lasting relationships and collaborations in Memphis and across Tennessee."

Ms. Klink describes herself as a "a mother, grandmother of six, friend, sister, daughter, and happens to be a person with a disability." She was a member of the 2006 statewide steering committee for the national meeting of the Alliance for Full Participation, helped the group prioritize advocacy plans and fought to make ending the institutional bias in Tennessee the number one priority. "Full access and inclusion are the priorities of life!" says Ms. Klink.



TENNESSEE YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

*A FREE LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY TRAINING PROGRAM FOR
TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES*

July 5-8, 2010 on Vanderbilt University campus in Nashville

Sponsored by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

For an application or more information contact

NED ANDREW SOLOMON • ned.solomon@tn.gov or 615.532.6556



DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS: MARCH 1, 2010



BREAKING GROUND READERS' SURVEY RESULTS

We received 19 completed surveys by mail and e-mail, representing readers from 12 counties across the State. Nearly 50% of the people who responded were individuals with disabilities or family members. Thank you to everyone who took the time to answer the questions and send the surveys to us. Special thanks to those of you who wrote comments. We will do our best to improve in the areas where you said we could do better.

Here is a look at the responses to all of the questions.

1. Is the newsletter readable (inviting, easy to read) and clearly written and edited?

- ☐ Excellent - **15**
- ☐ Good - **4**
- ☐ Fair - **0**
- ☐ Poor - **0**

2. Do you like the way the newsletter looks?

- ☐ Excellent - **13**
- ☐ Good - **6**
- ☐ Fair - **0**
- ☐ Poor - **0**

In your opinion, what is the MOST valuable type of information we publish?

- ☐ Reports on disability conferences - **1**
- ☐ Personal success stories - **6**
- ☐ Reports on projects and programs - **5**
- ☐ Resource information - **8**
- ☐ Other - **1**

In your opinion, what is the LEAST valuable type of information we publish?

- ☐ Reports on disability conferences - **6**
- ☐ Personal success stories - **3**
- ☐ Reports on projects and programs - **1**
- ☐ Resource information - **0**
- ☐ Other - **1**

Breaking Ground promotes self-determination and community participation for individuals with developmental disabilities

- ☐ Strongly Agree - **14**
- ☐ Agree - **3**
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree - **1**
- ☐ Disagree - **0**
- ☐ Strongly Disagree - **0**

Breaking Ground improves the ability of individuals with developmental disabilities and family members to make choices and exert control over the services and supports they use

- ☐ Strongly Agree - **10**
- ☐ Agree - **5**
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree - **3**
- ☐ Disagree - **0**
- ☐ Strongly Disagree - **0**

Breaking Ground improves the ability of individuals with developmental disabilities and family members to participate in community life

- ☐ Strongly Agree - **8**
- ☐ Agree - **9**
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree - **1**
- ☐ Disagree - **0**
- ☐ Strongly Disagree - **0**

Which category best describes you?

- ☐ Person with a disability or family member of a person with a disability - **9**
- ☐ Direct care provider or other disability-related service provider - **3**
- ☐ Educator - **4**
- ☐ Non-elected government employee - **2**
- ☐ Elected government official or representative of elected government official - **0**
- ☐ Other - **0**



A REMEMBRANCE OF TERRY MOORE

"Go forth into the busy world and love it. Interest yourself in its life, mingle kindly with its joys and sorrows."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

BY JEAN DOSTER

Could there be any better quote to capture the essence of Terry Moore? His legacy is his unfailingly positive attitude, his generosity and his humor. There are as many stories about Terry as there are people who knew him. People in his neighborhood will point you to the playground that he had built. His church family enjoys a beautiful labyrinth that he initiated and saw to completion. Many people will attest that he was their inspiration and a source of strength. But that most of all he was a good and faithful friend.

Terry was a beloved "uncle" to a great number of children. There were always kids running in and out of his house, hanging out, snacking on his food and talking to him. He really listened and cared about what they had to say.

For the past 14 years, Terry worked as the Medical Social Worker for the State's Traumatic Brain Injury Program. He was a tireless advocate for survivors of brain injury and their families. He loved Camp Hickory Wood and for the 10th anniversary season was named "King of Camp".

Terry made people feel loved and important. He wanted all the details of your stories. He worked hard but was always ready to laugh. When

he was determined to accomplish something, you can believe that he would make it happen. He always was available to listen to people's problems and managed to put them into perspective. But Terry rarely complained himself. Instead he sought inspiration and shared it with others. On his last day in the office before he left for a routine surgical procedure, he e-mailed the above quote from Emerson and added the following words:

"Are you living your life to its fullest? Life is obviously what we make it and we can choose to feel downtrodden in the negativity of the world or feel joyful in the wonderful blessings that are given us daily. Go for it... make your life the best that it can be and help that to radiate to others."

Charles Terry Moore was born April 13, 1954, and died on June 28, 2009. He was my colleague and my friend and I miss him terribly. But I am also grateful that we were able to share a path for all that time. My life is immeasurably richer from having known him.

Jean Doster is executive director of the Traumatic Brain Injury Program in the Department of Health

In July, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder unveiled its “new and improved” resource database. Behind the new design and even more user-friendly format, you’ll find a wide variety of resources and services for people with disabilities, a Disability Resources Library, a Calendar of Events, and links to Camino Seguro, our Hispanic outreach database, and Access Nashville, the restaurant accessibility project.

www.familypathfinder.org

Also in July, Megan Hart joined Pathfinder as training and outreach coordinator. As a person with a disability, she brings nearly 25 years of personal experience and six years of professional experience in the disability community to the position. Ms. Hart’s previous work experience includes community relations coordinator for the Technology Access Center of Middle Tennessee and funding specialist for the Tennessee Technology Access Program. Ms. Hart has a BA in psychology from Sewanee: The University of the South and an MEd in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

At Pathfinder, Ms. Hart coordinates and provides trainings at various community, state and national workshops and conferences; manages the publication and dissemination of the *Tennessee Services & Supports Directory*; maintains the Tennessee Disability Training Calendar; and assists with information and referral services.

Employment & Pathfinder

In this tight economy, finding employment is even more challenging as job seekers with disabilities compete with many other qualified applicants for a limited number of positions. There are many resources on the Pathfinder database that can help with employment. Go to www.familypathfinder.org, click on “Services Database”, click on the keyword “Vocational Training/Employment Services” under “Step 1: Choose a service category”, then search by county, region (east, middle or west) or throughout the entire State.

The following agencies in Tennessee provide vocational training and job placement assistance.

Tennessee Career Centers

These statewide, comprehensive centers provide services, including career information, computerized labor market information, Internet access, workshops, on-line talent bank, job placement, recruitment and training referrals.

Athens	www.secareercenter.org	(423) 745-2028
Columbia	www.sctworkforce.org	(931) 490-3830

Crossville	www.tennessee.gov/labor-wfd/cc	(931) 484-7456
Dyersburg	www.northwesttnareercenter.org	(731) 286-8300
Jackson	www.wtncc.org	(731) 668-2040
Memphis North Main	www.tennessee.gov/labor-wfd/cc	(901) 545-2240
Memphis Poplar	www.memphiscareercenter.com/poplar.htm	(901) 543-7535
Middle Tennessee Career Center		(615) 253-8920
Northeast Tennessee Career Center	www.netcc.org	(423) 610-0222
Southeast Tennessee Career Center	www.secareercenter.org	(423) 894-5354
Talbot	www.smokymtjobs.org	(423) 317-1075
Tennessee Career Center at Columbia	www.sctworkforce.org/	(931) 380-2738
Tullahoma	www.state.tn.us/labor-wfd/cc/cccounty_files/coffee.htm	(931) 454-1905
University Avenue Knoxville	www.discoveret.org/jobserv/	(865) 594-2741
Upper Cumberland Career Center	www.uccareercenter.com	(931) 520-8733

Tennessee Small Business Centers

These centers provide small business counseling and vocational training referrals.

Tennessee Tech University	www.tsdbc.org	(931) 372-3648
Austin Peay State University	www.tsdbc.org	(931) 221-7816
Chattanooga	www.tsdbc.org	(423) 756-8668
Cleveland State	www.tsdbc.org	(423) 614-8707
Dyersburg	www.tsdbc.org	(731) 286-3201
East Tennessee State University	www.tsbcd.org	(423) 439-8505
Four Lakes RDA	www.fourlake.org	(615) 374-4607
Jackson	www.tsdbc.org	(731) 424-5389
Knoxville	www.tsdbc.org	(865) 246-2663

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has phone, Web and print resources in English and Spanish to connect the Tennessee disability community with service providers. Referral services, free of cost, are provided to persons with disabilities, family members, service providers and advocates. Pathfinder is a joint project of the **TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES** and the **VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**.

Memphis	www.tsbd.org	(901) 333-5085
Middle Tennessee State University	www.tsbd.org	(615) 898-2745
Nashville	www.tsbd.org	(615) 963-7179
Vocational Rehabilitation	www.tennessee.gov/humanserv/st_map_trc_ttap.htm	

Regional Offices for Tennessee Rehabilitation Centers

Services include vocational evaluation, employee development and job placement; assistance with postsecondary job training, trade school, business school or college. Short-term placements and assistive technology evaluations also are available.

Camden	(731) 584-2147
Chattanooga	(423) 634-6700
Columbia	(931) 380-2563
Cookeville	(931) 526-9783
Jackson	(731) 423-5620
Johnson City	(423) 434-6934
Knoxville	(865) 594-6060
Memphis	(901) 528-5284
Nashville	(615) 741-1606
Central Office	(615) 313-4891

Goodwill Industries

Provides vocational training and employment services.

Chattanooga	www.goodwillchatt.org	(423) 629-2501
Clarksville	www.goodwillmidten.org	(931) 645-2310
Crossville	www.goodsamaritansinc.org	(931) 484-3225
Knoxville	www.gwiktn.org	(865) 588-8567
Memphis	www.goodwillmemphis.org	(901) 323-6221
Middle Tennessee	www.giveit2goodwill.org	(615) 346-1237
Murfreesboro	www.giveit2goodwill.org	(615) 898-1887
Spring Hill	www.giveit2goodwill.org	(615) 392-7755
Tenney	www.goodwilltnva.org	(423) 245-0600

Angela Bechtel, MSSW, is information & referral services coordinator with Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
Tennessee Disability Pathfinder
 English & Español
 (615) 322-8529
 (800) 640-4636

TTY/TDD users:
 please dial 711 for
 free relay service

www.familypathfinder.org
 tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu

SURVEY OF STATEWIDE NEEDS FOR SERVICES IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Researchers from the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC), in collaboration with the Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network, are investigating the need for disability services in Tennessee. We want to learn what is most important to the disability community and about needs across Tennessee. We plan to use your ideas to shape our work for the next five years. Filling out the survey is a good way to report on how well your community is doing and how much aid may be needed. It is a chance for us to learn from one another.

We invite you to complete our survey if you are:

- a person with a disability,
- a family member of a person with a disability,
- a person who works with individuals with disabilities, or
- a member of a disability organization.

The survey should take about 15 minutes.

You can find the on-line survey at:
<http://tinyurl.com/ofnbov>.

You can ask for a paper survey by calling the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center at **615-936-8852** or Toll-Free at **866-936-8852**.

THANK YOU IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR HELP IN PLANNING FOR TENNESSEE.

TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT



Photos by Courtney Taylor

TENNESSEE CELEBRATES COMPLETION OF 100th EASYLIVING HOME

Mayor Phillip Craighead and State **Rep. Susan Lynn** were among several dignitaries who attended a ribbon-cutting ceremony August 29th celebrating Tennessee's 100th certified **EasyLiving Home**, a house designed and built to be more accessible for people of all ages and abilities. The ceremony was held in **Stonebridge**, a Master Planned Community by **Goodall Homes and Communities** in **Lebanon**.

EasyLiving Home of Tennessee (ELH TN) is a statewide coalition of home builders, advocates for Tennesseans who are aging or with disabilities, and others seeking more houses that are cost effective, attractive and convenient for everyone.

"A real home is one where all your friends and family can visit. It is exciting to be celebrating the construction of this 100th home where that will be so easy," said **Carol Westlake**, executive director of the **Tennessee Disability Coalition**. ELH TN has certified houses in **Nashville, Lebanon, Knoxville, Dunlap, Gray, Gallatin, Murfreesboro, White House, Jackson** and **Kingsport**.

"This concept has really taken off in Tennessee and we expect that more and more homebuilders will recognize the benefits of constructing these houses," said **Wanda Willis**, executive director of the **Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities**.

"We're thrilled to participate in the celebration of the state's 100th EasyLiving Home. Houses like this are vital to **AARP**'s goal of making communities more livable for us all," said AARP Tennessee State Director **Rebecca Kelly**.

Members of the coalition include AARP Tennessee, **Appalachian Regional Coalition on Homelessness, Boyd Construction, Exit Real Estate Solutions, Goodall Homes and Communities, Home Builders Association of Middle Tennessee, Home Builders Association of Tennessee, McWhirter-Dillon LLC, Nashville Area Habitat for Humanity, Statewide Independent Living Council of Tennessee, Swanson Construction/Tennessee Comfort Living, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, Tennessee Disability Coalition, Tennessee Housing Development Agency, and the West Tennessee Housing Resource Network.**

Youth Leadership Forum 2009 graduate, **Kathleen Lehigh**, participated in the **2009 National Paralympic Games** this past Summer. Ms. Lehigh placed first in the 800 meter, 100 meter and 400 meter races. For the past three years, Ms. Lehigh has been the only female to run with a Racerunner, a mobility device, and has worked hard to get other young women to try the sport.

Her perseverance is paying off. This was the first year she has had female competition. The other young women are learning the sport and Ms. Lehigh is thoroughly enjoying mentoring them. In addition, Ms. Lehigh was featured in a **Fox News** television feature on the sporting event.

Partners 08-09 graduate, **Jo Ver Mulm**, was asked to attend a special meeting with Division of Intellectual Disabilities Services **Deputy Commissioner Steve Norris** about restoring **Family Support** after an announcement about recent cuts and potential future cuts to the program. Ms. Ver Mulm was present to explain what Family Support has meant to her family and the families she works with through a **Rutherford County** support group.

Partners 04-05 graduate, **Richard Moore**, was recently elected to serve on the Board of Directors for **The Arc of Williamson County**.

Partners 07-08 graduate, **Bill Dockery**, was selected as one of **Knoxville disAbility Resource Center's Spirit of ADA Award Winners** for 2009. Mr. Dockery was recognized as the **Spirit of ADA Advocate of the Year** because of his work through the **Knoxville Mayor's Council on Disability Issues** on addressing the limitations being put on the disability **LIFT** service by the **Knoxville Area Transit** bus system.

Claudia Avila-Lopez, Hispanic program coordinator at **Tennessee Disability Pathfinder**, has been appointed to the **Disabilities and Language Minorities Committee** of the **Tennessee Supreme Court's Access to Justice Commission**. The Committee is responsible for recommending initiatives and systemic changes to reduce barriers to access to justice for persons with disabilities who do not qualify for existing assistance programs by reason of their incomes, and for persons in language minorities.

Scott Higdon, a native of **Murfreesboro** with cerebral palsy, has been hired for the **Office of the Director of National Intelligence/ National Counterterrorism Center**. The **Situation Room** is critical to national security operations, providing up-to-the-minute intelligence information to the president and other key decision-makers.

"After a lengthy selection process, Scott Higdon was chosen to serve as a Duty Officer in the **White House Situation Room**," said White

House Press Secretary **Robert Gibbs**. "His extensive background in a variety of intelligence services and his established record of success at every level made Scott an easy pick for the job."

Mr. Higdon graduated from **Oakland High School** in 1981 and from **Middle Tennessee State University** in 1985 and 1986 with a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science and a Bachelor of Arts degree in earth science. He obtained a master's degree from the **University of Tennessee-Knoxville** in geography.



This past June, **VSA arts Tennessee** received the new **Arts Showcase Award** from **The Arc of Tennessee** during the **Tennessee Disability MegaConference Awards Banquet**. The Arts Showcase Award honors an individual or organization that promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities in the arts. The award recognizes individual

achievement or organizational promotion in drawing, visual art, painting, photography, sculpture, music, dance, theatre, poetry or other visual, performance or language arts.

VSA arts Tennessee is an affiliate of **VSA arts**, an international non-profit organization founded in 1974 by **Jean Kennedy Smith** to create opportunities for people with disabilities to learn through, participate in and enjoy the arts. VSA arts provides educators, parents and artists with resources and the tools to support arts programming in schools and communities.



At the same event, **Samuel Rees** of Nashville received the **Presidential Award** from **Ruth Roberts**, former president of The Arc of Tennessee. Mr. Rees is a businessman who provides lawn care for more than 90 people. He has been mowing lawns since his early teens and continues to attract

new customers because of his expertise. In addition to his lawn care business, Mr. Rees is also the producer for his dad's Internet broadcasts. He is very involved in public policy and regularly visits with his state and national legislators to discuss issues important to people with disabilities.

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JoEllen Fowler, Administrative Assistant

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE COUNCIL, CONTACT THE COUNCIL OFFICE AT Parkway Towers, 404 James Robertson Parkway, Suite 130, Nashville, TN 37243-0228
TELEPHONE: 615-532-6615 TTY: 615-741-4562 FAX: 615-532-6964 E-MAIL: tnddc@tn.gov WEB: www.tn.gov/cdd